

Joint Statement on the Imminent Closure of Nduta Camp and the Forced Repatriation of Burundian Refugees from Tanzania

23 April 2026

The imminent closure of Nduta camp, announced by the Tanzanian authorities, poses a serious and immediate risk of further forced returns of Burundian refugees, in clear violation of the principle of non-refoulement enshrined in the 1951 Refugee Convention. These returns are part of a broader pattern of targeted violations aimed at coercing Burundian refugees into leaving the country.

Transfers and repatriations tainted by illegality

In recent days, approximately 198 families have been transferred from Nduta camp to Nyarugusu camp in Tanzania, following an opaque selection process jointly conducted by Tanzanian authorities and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Presented as a measure aimed at ensuring the continuity of international protection for part of the Burundian refugee population in Tanzania, these transfers nevertheless raise several concerns. Consistent reports point to allegations of corruption and manipulation of transfer lists, as well as the inclusion of individuals close to the Burundian government tasked with monitoring refugees allowed to remain. These reportedly include members of militias known as *Sungusungu*, composed of Burundian refugees who are members of community security committees, closely aligned with Tanzanian and Burundian authorities, and operating within the camps to monitor, intimidate, and harass other refugees.

At the same time, coercive measures are increasing. Refugees are taken by the *Wanamugambo*, a youth militia affiliated with the ruling party in Tanzania, to transit centers where they are forced, under threat from a government camp representative known as *Makazi*, to give their fingerprints. They are then registered as voluntary returnees.

One refugee testifies: “I was forced, under threat, to provide my fingerprints as part of the repatriation process. I was then ordered to prepare for departure.” Now in hiding, she explains that she was forcibly placed on the list of voluntary returnees.

Operations are also reportedly being conducted beyond Tanzanian borders to identify and apprehend refugees who have fled the camps to escape these practices.

Systematic human rights violations

On April 19, 2026, at least 70 men armed with sticks and machetes, members of the *Wanamugambo* militia acting on the instructions of the Nduta camp manager, stormed the camp. They attacked refugees who were leaving the departure area to collect water and firewood, in order to force them back inside. Originally intended to host refugees registered for repatriation, the departure area now accommodates all refugees in Nduta camp who are not on the official transfer lists to Nyarugusu camp. According to collected information, more than 15 refugees were injured in the attack.

These incidents form part of a deeply concerning pattern of serious and repeated violations targeting Burundian refugees in Tanzania, including [abductions, enforced disappearances, as well as acts of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment](#). Consistent testimonies attribute these violations to collaboration between Tanzanian and Burundian intelligence services, particularly targeting political opponents and refugees perceived as critical of the government.

Since the Tanzanian authorities announced the closure of Nduta camp on December 23, 2025, coercive measures and violations have intensified. On April 13, 2026, the authorities declared that food assistance would henceforth be limited to refugees registered for return, depriving others of essential resources for survival and thereby exerting direct pressure on them to leave the territory.

At the same time, the withdrawal of refugee identity cards by UNHCR from individuals not included on official transfer lists results in the loss of legal status, exposing them further to arbitrary arrest and abuse.

This pressure is further reinforced through the creation of new offenses specifically targeting refugees. An official notice displayed in Nyarugusu camp states that any refugee found outside the camp may face a sentence of up to six months' imprisonment, effectively restricting their freedom of movement.

Finally, our organizations have documented several cases of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment targeting refugees and involving government camp officials, following arrests carried out by *Wanamugambo* militias acting on the instructions of the Tanzanian authorities. These acts of violence are aimed in particular at forcing refugees to register for repatriation or punishing them for discouraging others from returning to Burundi.

Serious risks upon return

Several [reports](#) document persecution, arbitrary arrests, and enforced disappearances faced by refugees upon their return to Burundi. Upon arrival, returnees are closely monitored and frequently targeted by the *Imbonerakure*, the ruling party's youth militia. Some refugees, after being forced to return, have had to flee again. Others report being compelled to return and now live in constant fear of arrest and disappearance.

In the current pre-electoral context, this policy of forced mass repatriation risks turning individuals who should benefit from international protection into political targets, in an already tense climate marked by a [resurgence of human rights violations ahead of elections](#).

The role of UNHCR and international inaction

Despite the [tripartite agreement](#) concluded on November 28, 2025, between Tanzania, Burundi, and UNHCR, which provided for the return of approximately 3,000 refugees per week, observed figures far exceed these targets and, in many cases, reflect returns carried out under coercion.

UNHCR itself has acknowledged [shortcomings](#) in the implementation of this agreement and has expressed serious concerns about the use of coercive measures, such as the demolition of homes in refugee camps. To date, however, these warnings have not been followed by concrete measures capable of halting the continued deterioration of the situation on the ground.

In this context, the persistent silence of the international community in the face of these violations is particularly alarming. The forced repatriation of Burundian refugees risks setting a dangerous precedent for refugee protection worldwide, including for many human rights defenders who remain unable to return to their country of origin, and reflects a broader and serious erosion of respect for international refugee law.

Urgent call

In light of the gravity of the documented facts, we call on:

- **The Tanzanian authorities** to immediately halt all forced returns and to fully comply with their international obligations by ensuring the safety and effective protection of refugees on their territory
- **UNHCR** to urgently strengthen its presence and protection mechanisms in the camps, in order to ensure strict compliance with the principle of non-refoulement and prevent any form of coercion in return procedures;
- **The international community** to take immediate action to condemn the forced return of Burundian refugees, prevent a further deterioration of the human rights situation in Burundi, particularly in the pre-election context, and avert the emergence of a major humanitarian crisis.

Signatories :

- Action des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture (ACAT) Belgique
- Action des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture (ACAT) Burundi
- Action des Chrétiens pour l'Abolition de la Torture (ACAT) France
- Association des journalistes burundais en exil (AJBE)
- Centre pour le Renforcement de l'Education et du développement de la Jeunesse (CREDEJ)
- Centre Raoul Wallenberg pour les droits de la personne
- Coalition burundaise des défenseurs des droits de l'homme (CBDDH)
- Coalition pour la Défense des Droits Humains vivant dans les Camps de Réfugiés (CDH/VICAR)
- Collectif des Avocats pour la défense des victimes de crimes de droit international commis au Burundi (Cavib)
- Ensemble pour le Soutien des Défenseurs des Droits Humains en Danger (ESDDH)
- Forum pour le Renforcement de la Société Civile Burundaise (FORSC Burundi)
- Forum pour la conscience et le développement (FOCODE)
- Impact General Center (IGC)
- International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
- International Federation of ACATs (FIACAT)
- International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT)
- King Umurundi Freedom (KUF-ASBL)
- Ligue Iteka
- Mouvement des Femmes et Filles pour la Paix et la Sécurité au Burundi (MFFPS)
- Mouvement INAMAHORO
- Réseau des Citoyens Probes (RCP)

- Refugee Rights Actions Organisation (RRAO)
- SOS-Torture Burundi
- Tournons La Page (TLP) – Burundi
- Union Burundaise des Journalistes (UBJ)
- World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)